



Supporting children with English as an additional language

Early Years Service, Children's Services

Buckinghamshire Council

Children learn English when:

- they hear the language that goes with what they are doing or looking at, so do plenty of parallel and self-talk (commenting on what you or they are doing) rather than asking questions, e.g. "You're jumping up the steps, you're jumping up the steps."
- they see visual prompts (pictures, props or gestures) that match what they are hearing, so maximise your visual clues and resources: e.g. "Go and put your coats on" (the adult adds the gesture of putting on a coat when s/he gives this instruction).

You can really help the language development of children if you seize on opportunities to do the following:

1. When you are playing alongside a child, describe what they are doing rather than asking lots of questions e.g. "You've chosen the purple pencil" rather than asking "What colour pencil have you chosen?"
2. Children learn English when they hear the language that goes with what they are doing or looking at, so do plenty of parallel and self-talk (commenting on what you or they are doing) rather than asking questions. Describe fully what you are doing – for example, when setting the table in the role play area say "I'm putting the spoon next to the plate. I'm putting the cup in the middle of the table..."
3. Do not try to make a child speak. Listen, wait and watch! Play silently alongside the child for a while if you think that is what is needed. When you do speak and make comments on what you or the child is doing, don't be disheartened if the child does not say anything. The language will still be 'going in' and being absorbed.
4. Focus on just a few new words in any activity, rather than children being bombarded with a 'sea of words', e.g. before starting a new story, introduce three of the keywords with pictures, pre-reading with key words.
5. Have paper and felt tip pens to hand so that you can draw something that the child hears others talking about but does not know what it is, e.g. a spider.
6. When a child makes a mistake, do not draw attention to it. Simply reply to the child using the correct language yourself. If a child says "We wented swimming", you could reply "You went swimming, did you?" The child immediately hears the correct language but is not made to feel that they got it wrong.
7. When a child says something, extend their vocabulary in your response. e.g. Child says "cow", you respond "The cow is eating." Child says "I've made a tunnel." You respond "Yes, you've made a long, dark tunnel."
8. Children with EAL often speak for the first time when joining in with familiar songs and rhymes, where there is 'safety in numbers'. Ensure this is a strong part of your practice. Seize on opportunities throughout the day to sing songs and rhymes – e.g. 'See Saw Marjorie Daw' when the children are on the seesaw; 'One Two Three Four Five once I caught a fish alive' when playing with plastic fish in the water tray... The rhyme, rhythm and repetition will help children to pick up the language and over time they may start to join in.
9. Encourage parents to strengthen and maintain the home language in the home. A strong home language will support the development of English and the acquisition of new words.

10. Use a buddy system to translate key written and spoken messages to the child.
11. Dual language books and posters. Also, dual language books available through Bookstart.
12. Invite parents to add labels in home language to displays or number line if script is different (will be challenge for others!).
13. "See me here" feel welcome e.g. in photos, home corner, skin colour crayons, festivals included in child chosen play.
14. Remember to praise the language contributions of the children and relay the achievements to their parents.

Useful websites

National Literacy Trust

- National Literacy Trust – [Understanding bilingualism in the Early Years](#)
- NLT have produced a series of [bilingual quick tips](#) for parents and practitioners to help children develop good talking and listening skills. It features a range of leaflets like watching TV, sharing a book, dummies awareness etc, in a broad variety of languages. Copies can be downloaded and photocopied free of charge to share with families.
- The NLT's '[Time Together](#)' booklet is a colourful and easy-to-read guide that is full of suggestions for how parents can support their young child's learning at home. It has been translated into eighteen different languages for you to share with the multilingual families in your setting or community.

I CAN

- '[Talk Together](#)' guides are available to download in a range of languages. They are designed to help parents help their children learn to talk.
<https://ican.org.uk/media/2386/talk-together-2020.pdf> (English)
- '[Talk Together](#)' in other languages (select fourth option).
- [I CAN EAL fact sheet](#)

Other websites:

- [Primary National Strategies - Supporting children learning English as an additional language](#)
- The [Bell Foundation have an assessment framework](#) you can use to support you with your EAL provision
- The [Bell Foundation](#) has resources to support you with children who have EAL.
- This [blog](#) from the Bell Foundation may be useful.
- [NALDIC](#) is the national subject association for EAL
- [Sound Communities](#), great website from ICAN about tips and strategies
- [Pacey](#) – hints and tips